EIGHT MORE HARVARD POETS

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EIGHT MORE HARVARD POETS

EDITED BY
S. FOSTER DAMON
AND
ROBERT HILLYER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
DORIAN ABBOTT

NORMAN CABOT · GRANT CODE · MALCOLM COWLEY
JACK MERTEN · JOEL T. ROGERS · R. CAMERON
ROGERS · ROYALL SNOW · JOHN
BROOKS WHEELWRIGHT

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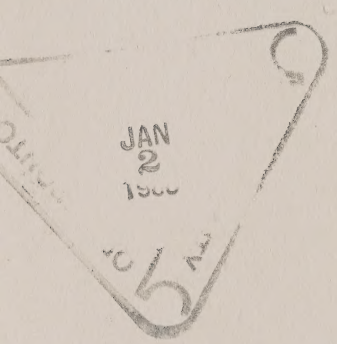

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THIS FIRST VOLUME

OF THE

HARVARD POETRY SOCIETY SERIES

IS DEDICATED

TO

LEBARON RUSSELL BRIGGS '75

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For permission to reprint many of these poems, thanks are due the editors of the *American Poetry Magazine*, *Broom*, *Contemporary Verse*, the *Dalhousie Review*, the *Dial*, the *Gargoyle*, the *Harvard Advocate*, the *Harvard Monthly*, the *Literary Review* of the New York *Evening Post*, the *Little Review*, the *Measure*, the *North American Review*, the *Pagan*, *Poetry, a Magazine of Verse*, *Secession*, *Tempo*, *Voices*, and *Youth*.

PREFACE

IT was under Norton's benison that the *Harvard Advocate* offered its first book of verses[1] to the public, more for its interest as a reflection of undergraduate thought and sentiment than for any intrinsic excellence. The journal had accumulated, in the ten years following the War of the Secession, not a little worthy material. Such pieces as those beginning:

Riding up from Bangore
On the Pullman Train,

and,

It was a nobby Sophomore
Was born in Boston Town,

still serve, at least for the heirs of two or more Harvard generations, to fill that emptiness, which but for ephemeral rag, jazz, and blues, is American song. The *vers de societé* is tolerable; but the more serious the poems, the worse; and the volume attains noteworthiness only within the limits imposed by the dominance of parlour trickery, the eclecticism of Lowell, and the dotage of Longfellow. Curtis's quatrains, however, which characterize Newport beach in rainy weather, have found

[1] *Verses from the Harvard Advocate*, Cambridge, 1876.

their way into anthologies of more professional pretensions; and such names as Robert Grant, Martin, Emerton, Palmer, Woodbury, and Fenollosa jump from the table of contents under the eyes of the casually informed peruser. These men were to be distinguished, in the drab decades that followed, for their liberation from the all-pervading dominance of finance.

In that very spring of 1876, a group centering about Curtis lampooned Norton and Eliot, and so inaugurated American satire of social, political and intellectual life. But our letters have not yet been enriched by an anthology of Lampy's poets and draftsmen; and, judging from the *Advocate's* second series of verses [1] (to which Justice Holmes's father, the Doctor, contributed a sort of companion-piece to the "One Hoss Shay"), it seems that the older paper was made the poorer by the gaiety of its younger rival. The volume contains nothing which has lived in song or memory. It is indeed quite without character, save that parodies and imitations of Chaucer, set in Gothic type, lend it a facile tone. The index offers new names as yet not unknown to fame: Kittredge, Grandgent, Carlton Sprague, H. H. Furness, Jr. Among the poems there is a "Receipt for Aestheticism," very in the *Patience* manner, which indicates that the

[1] *New Verses from the Harvard Advocate, 1876–1886*, New York.

still "abnormally solemn and self-satisfied" journal was prejudiced against the respectable aspects of undergraduate thought and feeling.

In that year of 1886, it seemed to those who won a position for the *Monthly* that there had never been in the college a means for publishing anything worth printing. A quarter of a century later, their volume of selected poems [1] proved that such a medium had most ably been supplied. This anthology comprises not only distinguished performances by Allanson Houghton and Swinburne Hale, but some of Santayana's sonnets and the early work of Carman, Moody, and Robinson. The latter's *Richard Cory*, one of the most striking short poems in the language, had appeared in the magazine, but was excluded from the book perhaps because the criteria of the editors were too sternly classic. These early volumes of the paper contain verse by Frederic Palmer, Berenson, George P. Baker, William Roscoe Thayer, MacKaye, and Seeger; but the *Monthly's* main forte was ever critical. The old Lampooner, Wendell, when inaugurating the academical attempt to teach young men how to write English, gave the editors the best themes in his courses; and Wendell, contagious teacher, was ever finer as critic. Eliot's greater Harvard of free elections, of naive faith in

[1] *Selected Poems from the Harvard Monthly*, Cambridge, 1910.

education, was given its best expression by the *Monthly* in its prose.[1]

During the decades which stretched on either side of our war for Cuba, the *Advocate*, still staunchly unaesthetic, managed to attract to its sanctum poets who represented the revolt against the professorial of all that is not business. Its third book is devoted to the short story,[2] but those anthologies which celebrate its fortieth [3] and fiftieth anniversaries [4] preserve numerous creditable poems from Mark Howe, Train, Child, Bynner, Hagedorn, St. John, Wallace Stevens, Harold Bell, Corbin, Macey, Langdon Warner, Van Wyck Brooks, and Aiken.

With the departure of Santayana, with the accelerated paternalism of a new academic administration, the *Monthly*, still the spokesman for undergraduate thought, found itself no longer the spokesman of the college. Having recovered at least

[1] Steben's *Harvard Lyrics and Other Verses*, 1889–1899, contains poems by Furness *fils*, and Robinson. *The Poets of the Future*, edited by Schnittkind in a series of three volumes, 1915–1918, reprinted poems by J. T. Rodgers, Vaughan, Allinson, H. H. Furness Jayne, Auslander, Snow, and mentioned as worthy of distinction others by Stodart Colby, Christopher La Farge, Jr., and Wheelwright.

[2] *Stories from the Harvard Advocate, 1866–1896*, Cambridge, 1896.

[3] *Verses from the Harvard Advocate, Third Series, 1886–1906.* Cambridge, 1906.

[4] *Selections from the Harvard Advocate, 1906–1916. The Fifty Year Book.* Cambridge.

from the orthodoxy of socialism, it settled down to a consistently *neinsagen* attitude, which the college, continuing more and more in the graces of democracy, surveyed with ever-increasing indifference. A notion of the character of the *Monthly's* journalistic performance is now most conveniently obtained from a perusal of any current issue of the *Dial.* Poems by the editors of the present volume, and Wright, Cummings, Mitchell, Poore, Dos Passos constantly enlivened its pages until in May, 1917, the editors regretted that "existing circumstances" compelled the suspension of publication during the immediate future.

The *Advocate* had suffered mutation and was publishing poems from the same hands and from Norris's as well. In the introduction to the anthology [1] wherein Roosevelt, the paper's pet, displayed a bit of preparedness propaganda, the editors, entrenched behind tradition, no longer apologized to clubmen and athletes for intellectual preoccupation, but invited them 'just to look about in the list of authors and see how many became famous.'

In spite of this coming-of-age of high seriousness, it was without the imprimatur of either brother Tweedle, militarist Dum, or pacifist Dee, that *Eight Harvard Poets* appeared in 1917 after a

[1] *Selections from the Harvard Advocate, 1906–1916. The Fifty Year Book.* Cambridge.

printer's delay of two years.[1] The book is in the full flood of modernist and Georgian fashion, and did not a little to advance these young writers, Damon and Norris of the *Advocate*, and the six *Monthly* poets, towards the various positions they now occupy in the literary mêlé. By the time the volume appeared, most of its contributors were abroad in the wars. By the time the contributors had returned, the *Advocate*, which had managed to survive the distasteful hysteria which prevailed over the battle of Harvard Square, was making an attempt, even now uncertain in its fulfilment, to gather in its pages the college *litterati*. A gathering at once more heterogeneous and more significant was that which attended the meetings of the Poetry Society under Hillyer, whose book of sonnets [2] remains the only volume of undergraduate verse published by the University. Under Dean Briggs's and Professor Lowes's encouragement, prosody assumed its place in college life, but it proved impossible to weld together any group as homogeneous as the *Eight;* who, while they disagreed passionately, composed a school.

The years which followed them were those of the lean kine. The pedagogic method of producing authors had definitely failed. "Only God does

[1] *Eight Harvard Poets*, New York, 1917.

[2] *Sonnets and other Lyrics*, Robert Silliman Hillyer, Cambridge, 1917.

that," said Wendell in one of his last lectures, adding with characteristic mock egotism, "I am not God." He seemed to regret all the years spent in such profitless labour. Certainly it is regrettable that the college lost for four years and then forever, his genius for penetrating and sympathetic criticism. Few of his books present his full power in sustained strength, his last, for all its masterly scope and grasp, resembling in majesty of chronological platitude the cultural compilations of the Dark Ages. The decade soon to be completed is one wherein cross-pollination has but seldom enriched the minds of those doomed to solitude by a mob too exultant over athletic victory to respect much else. Harvard individualism has become proverbial, but inappropriately so. There are no longer any groups to make it vigorous.

So it was fortunate that Damon and Hillyer, upon their return from Copenhagen, consented to edit this anthology, for many of the contributors are known only by name to the others. No volume could have been formed but for them, and the poems here presented to the public would otherwise have remained buried for years in files of the college papers or, even less happily, in a number of first volumes, so perilous, so mortifying.

The advantage of an anthology lies in its evasion

of that presumption always implied when an unknown poet spreads, over a hundred pages or so, his gleanings from experience, his poverty of technique. As *Eight More Harvard Poets* covers a period like those which lazy historians are prone to term "transition," many of the poems represent not so much the juvenilia as the early maturity of the various contributors. So it follows that much Harvard verse has been excluded from this book only that its merit may appear to greater advantage in some subsequent publication. And then there are poets whose successes have been so recent and so frequent that they could derive but slight advantage from being represented in an anthology which makes claim neither to catholicity nor to infallibility. Innocent of pride, then, if not of folly, this book has been compiled with little hope that it will be distinguished from its predecessors by penetrating any further the surface of popular consciousness, but with confidence that there is captured herein an essence of the intellectual temper of undergraduate life. So various, so elusive, and withal so obscure has this temper ever been, as to warrant the prefacing of this collection by a résumé of former similar ventures.

DORIAN ABBOTT

109 BRATTLE STREET, CAMBRIDGE
November 1, 1922

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NORMAN CABOT

PEACE

A SINGULAR virtue is in the heat of spring,
The first great heat that, like a murmurless stream,
Whelms us about. The languor of a dream
Is poured around us. Sun and stillness wring
All keenness from activity, yet bring
An easiness of living, peace supreme.
More sweet than vigorous pinions do I deem
A happy hovering on uncertain wing.

In its enchantment we disown our race
For peoples of less restlessness and wrath;
Sicilian shepherds piping in a space
Of sunlit pasture-land or checkered path,
Moors blinking idly in the market-place,
Or Roman courtiers sauntering to the bath.

TRANSCENDENCY

A MORE imposing chaos than our own
Rolls round us. This immediate mess
Promotes a vaster hodge-podge, in turn less
Than one yet mightier. All things that, alone,
Have plan and purpose ultimately enthrone
A universal dissonance, possess
The seeds of some celestial foolishness
To our misapprehensions yet unknown.
What balm to meditate when Heaven's vain show
Of lawless myriads clutters up the sky
That this same glittering universe may flow
A corpuscle inside the stepped-on toe
Of some more hugely blundering ass than I!

EREIOTATOS

HEAVEN'S hierarchies defend me! Ill-conditioned powers
Give respite to us all! A shaft of light
Shrieked from the empyreal fastnesses with showers
Of fire and hail and adamant into night.
Earth groaned and died. A universe of gloom
Rushed to one central altitude. An ocean
Of blood and blackness swallowed me up. A doom
Fell round my limbs and robbed me of all motion.
Chill was the ascending thunder of death. My lips were blue;
My mind was gone; my heart was full of you!

RAILROADING

TODAY I paid two dollars and was hurled
Along an iron road. The murderous might
Of steel and bellowing water-demons whirled
Swift wheels that bore us out into the light
To traverse the broad bosom of the world
In summer's glad green and glittering after night.

A feast of life it was. For what, indeed,
Is life but motion, motion life; and, so,
Such sense of care-free, devil-engendered speed,
Deep drafts of life with no corrupting woe,
A Bacchanalian orgy of all that reed,
Pen, brush, or sculptural instrument can show?

INSANITY

PASSION and Strength! Strength, Passion!
Men who yearn
Are not men who achieve. The poet's fierce fire
Has too frail stuff to feed on; it must burn
In brief, unheating blazes or expire.

Passion and Strength! Could my uneasy heart
Possess yon lumbering clod-of-earth, my gall,
Breed insolence in his great bulk, what art,
What social revolutions, might befall?

Could that which takes hot life from me this hour
Forsake the fuel it gnaws upon and then
From this soft sap-wood generate new power,
Heaven help this silly world of gods and men!

WORTHLESSNESS

GOOD spirits turn shuddering from scenes of
decay,
Mid-winter barrenness, autumnal rains,
Pavements tenantless and no longer illuminated be-
tween night and day,
Bleak houses issuing on unhealthy lanes.

I, whom the dart of this sad universe
Has pierced beyond all bleeding, whose dumb
powers
Rustle and heave and meditate a curse
To waken hatred in the unweeting hours,

Have wooed these things, and in confusion find
A vision of my futility; possess
A symbol, there, of my disordered mind;
The tangible form of my own worthlessness.

GRANT CODE

SHAVINGS

FURTIVE as those condemned to dwell
Behind such doors as iron locks,
Men pace the narrow city blocks
Each cringing in his cell,
Where even the sound of grim footfalls
Is caught and beaten back by walls.

The desperate man who half escapes
To that half freedom called a park,
Like some marauder in the dark,
Hastes with uncertain steps
Beside a river, steel-bridge-barred,
Water made grim by walls, and hard.

He sees a narrow plane of light
Carve from the water sunbeam chips;
Shavings of day-dust float like ships
Flashing with gold and white.
He laughs to see the fancied fleet
Drift toward the landing at his feet.

Once a knife flashed, and shavings strewed
A shipyard; where, bare-ankle-deep,

Boys waded through a yellow heap
Of flaked and powdered wood.
The air gleamed thick with dusty motes,
Fragrant with all the smells of boats.

Clouds swing across the light of day,
Close their grey doors against the skies:
The fire upon the water dies;
The chips are ashen grey.
The dreamer gropes. His fingers feel
The river fence, the bars of steel.

Behind such doors as iron locks
Childhood itself has gone to dwell.
He turns again to face the cell,
To pace the narrow city blocks.

LOVE'S CYNICISM

WISELY you smile at love's sad corollary;
It is more wise to smile when hearts are broken,
Lest real griefs — become imaginary —
Breed morbid phantoms. It is best to reckon
Past years but as the pages of romance,
Past selves as quaint, fantastic characters,
Given reality of passion once,
Now too remote for retrospective tears.
Think then of the white lilies that we drew
From shadowed waters of the still lagoon,
The well-remembered fragrance, and the few
Dark willows drawn across the falling moon
As fragments of a story read to while
Frail hours with sentiment; think this, and smile.

THE SONS OF HEAVEN

For a Painting by Nicholas Roerich

DEEP in the shoreward crags of earth is cleft
A fissure, where the gloomy slabs of jade
Gleam through the purple and blue of shadow, laid
Dull lacquer on the stone. A pool is left,
Blue silver frosted. But beyond the rift
The hidden sea's wave symphony is played
Against the deaf cliff's outer barricade,
Whence to the silent gorge no echoes drift.

Four earthly women, wanly celibate,
Crouch at the threshold of a cavern mouth —
A chasm of shadow in a chasm riven —
One turning back; two mutely desolate;
And one with face uplifted toward the south —
Sightless before the ruddy sons of heaven.

CHRISTMAS

THIS is the day the great god Pan lies dead,
While all his furry fauns and satyrs go
Godless and whining through the falling snow
Out of a dreary Christian heaven shed.
No bright-limbed dancers in free, careless measure
Follow young Bacchus of the green-wreathed head;
An elder god, and sorry-eyed, has said
That mirth is folly, melancholy pleasure.

And yet, they say, in merry Galilee
A weeping faun beheld a blithe young man
Who, moved with pity, cut some rushy weeds,
From which he whittled several tuneful reeds,
And took the little faun upon his knee
To soothe his sobbing with the pipes of Pan.

DEPARTED TRAVELLERS

I HAVE been exiled among stony hilltops
Tumbled under the dun clouds.

I have seen hilltops dancing with yellow,
Poppies laughing among the mustard gold.

I understand that the dead also,
Remembering this country,
Have wistful eyes.

GRANT CODE

THE BLACK BEAST

SAVAGE limbs of that black beast, the forest,
Quiver cruelly in the darkness;
Beneath the black belly of the pines,
The earth is afraid.

The claws of the monster of a thousand limbs
Pierce the flinching moss,
And grate on the white flint bones of the earth,
Striking fire.

Flames frozen in white pebbles
Shiver under the darkness.

These limbs are planted firmly,
Nailed to the flint with claws;
It is safe to be lost in the blind night
Among the claws that cannot strike.

But the rustling of his fur is dreadful
As he breathes above.

Somewhere the eyes of the forest glare at the stars.

LOVE IN DEATH

Prologue

HOW do we live? How do we draw our breath
Under the stagnant grey of a city sky?
Who has given us daily courage to wake,
To rise in the morning, to look out of our windows,
To face the insane, geometric walls and spires,
Roofs and chimneys and endless drooping wires?
Prisoners in the walls of perpetual death,
Shall we be dead forever and never die?

There are confused, half-comprehended stories
Of a wan white face, a tired, dead face, who came
Out of some stagnant eddy of walls and spires,
Sick with the urgent thronging of sad desires,
Dazed with the roar and rumble of cars and motors,
The dust and glitter of shoddy limousines,
Drays and trucks and carts and wagons and cabs.
After the incoherent mutter of streets,
The ocean spoke with a strong, untroubled voice.
A white face turned to the line of sky with yearning.
White hands were lifted in prayer to the naked stars.

Hot, white feet pressed the cool dust of shells.
Then someone descended slowly out of the shadows,
Stepped through the ripples of yellow water-light,
Laughed at the touch of the smooth cool water
rising —
Water lifting to clasp his waist and shoulders.
He quit the sand and slid through a crystal ocean,
Reached out into the silence with languid arms,
Drew his weary muscles through soothing water
Out of the powder of foam, white feather of bubble.

How long did he follow the moon road over the
water?
How long ascend the white path to the sky?
What did they say when they found he had gone
away?
Stepped to the edge of the earth and paused a
moment,
Lifted in vision to the high horizon
Along the white moon pathway to the stars,
Facing the endless ocean as one faces
Eternal death.
Did he smile at the stars, admire a broken shell,
Stir the sand about his feet like a child?
Did he start when a heron cried; did he shiver
and laugh?
The murmurous voice of the ocean whispers: He
smiled!

He slid out of the light into the shadows,
Floated in shadows, swam in the shadows, bathed
In cool green shadows lit with yellow light,
Dove through the smooth green hollow of a wave.

Day followed night forever across the water.
Wave and tide and light descended to shore.
Does he live, except in legend, who sought to follow
The lane of light that swept up over the sea?
The whispering babble of ocean murmurs: Follow;
Be drawn toward the urgent beauty and pain of stars;
Find the peace of the sea and live no more.

The tide returned slowly; the silent beach
Caught grey shadows of dawn in hollow pools
Where feet had passed; waves sauntered along the pebbles;
Small waves carelessly touched the deserted rags;
Wind-driven sand and water obliterated
The pathetic trail descending into the sea,
Erased the story and set the swimmer free.
The dreadful tide welled up into the coves
Between the scum-green piles of the wooden bridge.
Tresses of seaweed floated upon the water —
Strands of sodden kelp like sea-drowned hair.
There were empty garments awash at the water's edge.

GRANT CODE

This is a legend of the mysterious sea,
Drifting in whispers through my empty room,
Heard through fragments of a departing dream.
My dream thoughts follow the drowsy thought and story
Up the lane to the fringe of sand and spray.
My murmurous thoughts whisper like speaking water,
Whisper my legend too of the dreadful sea.

How shall we live unless we turn aside
From the sad white faces, the wan dead faces passing,
Interminable sick faces crowded forward
And the deadly monotone of persistent feet
Thrust forever down the desperate street?

Somewhere a lane is wet with pools of sunlight,
Falling like rain through a cloud of windswept leaves.
Somewhere a white lane sweeps up over a hillside,
Over a moor to a white cliff by the sea.
Somewhere waves roll down from a clean horizon
To dissolve in smoke on a bar of pebble and sand.
Climb the lane and the moor and you may stand
High in the sun and the wind from across the sea,
Crushing the deadly hellebore under foot,
Wading in fragrant juniper up to your knee.
There looking down to the tossing fringe of spray

You may see the brown-skinned fishermen's children play,
Tumble out of the water in games and races
With sleek drenched hair and streaming limbs and faces.
Shall we not hope to stand on an open headland,
Clean of the filth and clutter of crowded men;
Watch the thin bright disc of a coral sun
Slant through sprays of cloud like apple branches
To coral waves on an ocean apple green?

Stand at evening on a cool sand margin —
Powdered rock and the dust of seaweed and shells —
Desert the hypocritical rags of the city,
Raise our arms to the light of the naked stars?
Shall we not descend out of the shadows,
Walk through the ripples of saffron phosphorescence,
Quit the earth and glide through a crystal ocean,
Reach into the silence with languid arms,
Through the smooth water draw our gleaming muscles
Out of the feather of foam white powder of bubble?

How shall we live, how shall we draw our breath
Under the stagnant grey of a city sky?
How shall we turn aside from the sad, dead faces?
How shall we walk freely under the stars?
How shall we bathe in the sunlit windy places?
How shall we leave the walls of perpetual death?
Shall our dust be blown among them after we die?

MALCOLM COWLEY

CHÂTEAU DE SOUPIR: 1917

JEAN tells me that the Senator
came here to see his mistresses.
As master and proprietor
the servants ushered him — Jean says —
past bogus Flemish tapestries
velvets and mahoganies
to where the odalisque was set
the temporary queen, Odette.

An eighteenth-century château
rebuilt to suit the modern taste
painted and gilt fortissimo
where Germans grown satirical
constructed a machine-gun nest
underneath the banquet hall.

Their trenches run diagonally
across the gardens and the lawns
and jagged wire from tree to tree;
the lake is desolate of swans;
in tortured immobility
the deities of stone and bronze
await a new catastrophe.

Phantasmagorical at nights
yellow and white and amethyst
the starshells burn and Verey lights
and silent rivers of the mist
flood the landscape till we feel
like drowned men, ghastly and unreal.

And recent ghosts appear: Odette
in skirt ballooning at the hips
tosses a hasty kiss and slips
away to taunt the Senator
who strong with marc and anisette
pursues her like a matador.

The fleeing feminine takes cover
behind a hellenistic Venus
coquettishly smiling to her lover
while he, beard waggling in the wind,
seems an overdressed Silenus.

The mist hangs lower gradually,
an enemy machine gun mocks
this ante-bellum delicacy
and when the firing is at rest
a bronze Priapus grieves, his chest
a perforated pepper box.

MALCOLM COWLEY

TWO SWANS

ONE morning during Carnival they found two swans in the
Public Garden, their long necks twisted, two swans lying
splendidly dead under a magnolia

not yet in blossom and nobody ever knew why they were
killed, whether it was a drunkard, whether an old man
tired of women's bodies and wishing thus to destroy

a more impeccable beauty, or was he young (over them bends
a domino, black with white moons for buttons, while the
sky like a domino bends more vastly over).

It was a crime of passion; if I have read

of other passionate crimes in curtained alcoves,
knife or poison, they were less splendid than these two
dead swans, O less magnificent than the formal pool,
empty without them, this empty pool which stares

fixedly into a fixed and empty sky.

TRANSLUCENT FINGERS

TRANSLUCENT fingers on the yellow keys
Angelique plays
a movement from a Mendelssohn sonata
we watch a smile ghostly upon her lips
— All day she practices.
— What rhapsodies!
we say and drink our tea in noiseless sips.

— What tone she has, what soul!
— And how she works, and how her hands are clever!
(Although you still embroider for your hope-chest,
O Angelique, and though your hair is fragrant
and soft as lilacs beside you in a bowl
they will never marry you, never).

In the gilt mirror, the corners of your eyes
observe them, how they are
already drawn in patterns like your laces.
The young men died in the war.

Lamenting them forever
your hands will forever brush across the keys
like wind among the reeds, faint melodies
heard dimly like a tinkle of distant cowbells.

It ceases never
the last chord will never be resolved
but always it will hang in dusty corners
behind closed doors that nevermore swing back
and in this house will be no other mourners
only yourself among the bric-a-brac,

only yourself to live among the echoes
to watch the lace of delicate lines that spread
daily above your eyes
to watch the lilac nimbus leave your head
and fingers that grow old like ivories
and they will set you on the mantelpiece
to keep a faithful watch over your dead.

Beside a bowl of artificial fruit
beside a clock that never strikes the hours
or maybe strikes in other centuries
you will be set upon the mantelpiece
to live among the other waxen flowers.

FIFTEEN MINUTES

THE room is dark, he says; there is nothing
living here
except a clock that ticks its heart away
its brass heart against a nickel breast;
nothing remains of those that inhabit here by day
and dust sifts down on the worn coverlet; dust
filters through torn lace curtains, making queer
amorphous bars across the avenue of escape into
the sunset:
tread softly; there are only dead abiding here.

But in the darkness the clock
ticks viciously at every second
the minutes stalk
pompously across the field of consciousness
an hour is a time unreckoned:

precise and categorical
the seconds hammer on the wall.

At their touch the flesh disintegrates
the mind is reduced to cerebrum and cerebellum
dirty grey whorls like a ball of cotton waste
like bundles of soiled linen, like clothes cast off and
shoddy;

the seconds drip from a great height
each exploding against the tips of my nerves
against the shell of my insubstantial body;
each second is eroding like the rain
its bit of flesh, its bit of putrescent brain

> — I shall countenance this no longer said the Philosopher seizing his clock and hurling it down the staircase and as it rolled it punctuated his remarks very regularly as if it were proclaiming that Rhythm is the essence of life, life, I must have it, Life said the Philosopher and

returned to his accustomed place
the room had grown so dark he could not see
leaving him out of time and out of space
whirled in an eddy of eternity

and yet his heart beat seventy beats to the minute
time was drumming at the taut skin of his temples
time dripped through his veins.

MOUNTAIN FARM

I WATCHED the agony of a mountain farm,
a gangrenous decay;
the farm died with the pines that sheltered it
the farm died when the woodshed rotted away.

It died to the beat of a loose board on the barn
that flapped in the wind all night;
nobody thought to drive a nail in it.
The farm died in a broken window light,

a broken pane upstairs in the double bedroom
through which the autumn rain
beat down all night on the mouldy turkey carpet;
nobody thought to putty another pane.

Nobody thought to nail a slat on the corncrib
nobody mowed the hay
nobody came to mend the rotting fences.
The farm died when the two boys went away,

or maybe lived till the lone old man was buried
but after it was dead I loved it more
though poison sumac grew in the empty pastures,
though ridgepoles fell and though the fall winds
whistled
all the night through an open and empty door.

MALCOLM COWLEY

FOR A GEORGIAN ANTHOLOGY

THE dance was over. There was one last fiddle
Playing a crazy jig, but no one listened.

His friends in couples walked across the meadow
And down the lane. He watched their bobbing
lanterns
That disappeared into the woods, and thought
— She will be coming soon, she will be coming.

Two ghostly owls were mating in the woodlot.
His mare stamped restlessly. A bullfrog groaned
Across the marshes. In a fencerow hidden,
Farmers roared in chorus over their beer.
But in his ears the shouting and the laughter,
The marsh frogs and the owls had formed a music,
A burden that his blood throbbed and repeated
— She will be coming soon. She will be coming.

Why was he waiting? When the month was over
He might be in the city, meeting people
Finer than these — girls twenty times as lovely.
He'd have his money then, and hear no longer
These backwoods farmers and drunken lumberjacks
Singing into their beer.
But if he married
And stayed at home to marry, he would be
A farmer like his father and his brothers,

And all his life would follow in their round
Of plowing, sowing, cultivating, reaping;
Of threshing and of plowing and of harvest.
He could not marry her. But still the chorus
Of silly words rang in his ears, insistent
— She will be coming. Soon she will be coming.

Out of the shadow she slipped into moonlight
And stood beside him staring with round eyes,
Expectantly.
— Why Harry, you're not angry?
What makes you . . . you're so quiet —
He bent over
Slowly and kissed her. Both their shadows
lengthened
Across the hayfield, where the dew had turned
The stubble into silver. And the frogs,
The lonely owls that screeched across the woodlot
The laughter and the drunken lonely fiddle
Out of discordance turned to symphony,
Turned to an intoxicated chorus

— She came to meet me here, came here to meet me.

MALCOLM COWLEY

RUNAWAY

I

NOW after Bob had fed the cattle
— it was a morning late in fall —
and after he had watched his father
drive to the fields with Prince and Doll
he stole to the doorway and in silence
climbed the steps and crossed the hall.

Safe in his room above the kitchen
he tossed his clothes about and jerked
into the suit he wore on Sundays
and brushed his Sunday shoes. Below
Mother was singing as she worked;
he wished that he had let her know.

Struggling with his worn valise
he tiptoed down the empty hall.
The door held tight. He strained in wrath.
It yielded and crashed against the wall.
Nobody came. He strode in peace
along the flagstones of the path.

II

Coley, his black hound, followed
and barked and ruffled his curly
black hair and seemed to ask him
— Why go to town so early?

Coley, his black hound, followed
running as if insane
in circles and ellipses
and bayed and whooped and holloed
like twenty thousand gypsies
along the narrow lane.

But Bob turned squarely in his track
and cursed his dog and stoned him back.

III

He trampled ice that edged the puddles
— there was a frost the night before —
and went a-stumbling into ditches
where asters lingered, stiff and hoar.

He watched the leaves of sugar maples
twist in eddies of purple and red
and leaves of the yellow birch that fluttered
like yellow butterflies overhead,

and pine trees which were bending gravely
in rank as if at exercise
and hemlocks silver in the wind
and watched it all through misty eyes.

IV

Of course he would come back. Of course
he would come home as rich as any
he knew the stories of the many
boys who walked to town and then
in limousines rode back again
and bought farms for their folks —

Why, say,

his father would be glad enough
some time, that he had gone away.

But mebbe Mother would be dead
when he came back — he couldn't tell
and mebbe Dad would have to sell
the farm . . . and questions filled his head
and if he stopped then, or sat down
(half in fear he quickened his pace)
he never would have come to town.

V

At last when he had climbed the hill
he turned to see what he was leaving

and said again — I will come back,
but he was only half believing.
The brown squares that the plow had scored
lay under him, a checkerboard
and mist rose from the marsh. He never
had seen the land look half so fair
as now it seemed when woodlots burned
as if they had been seared by the air.
But taking a quick hard breath he turned
westward again, and was gone forever.

MALCOLM COWLEY

COAL TOWN

THEY scarred the hillside here to build a town:
gaunt above slag and cinder, and despising
the paint-splashed cabins, muddy pink and brown,
the tipple looms — vast, black, uncompromising.

All day the wagons lumber past: the wide
squat wheels hub deep, the horses strained and
still,
the headlong rain pours down all day to hide
the blackened stumps, the ulcerated hill.

O beauty:
all my life I loved you fiercely
and even in this desolate place, where rain
drips endlessly from all the eaves, and scarcely
a leaf sprouts, and the earth is wracked with pain
beauty is hammering, pounding through my brain.

ABOUT SEVEN O'CLOCK

ABOUT seven o'clock, when they have wiped the
last of the supper dishes
the housewives of Altamont emerge on their front
porches,
selecting rocking chairs
they sway, rhythmically:
one . . . two (and the soles of their shoes tap the
floor)
one . . . two.

Today it is very hot. Yesterday
there wasn't a cloud in the sky.
Rain tomorrow, maybe, and cooler weather after.
July — in the eighteen-seventies or nineteen-ten
or fifty years from now, it doesn't matter:
one . . . two (and their shoes beat out the meter
on the porch floor)

till at half-past nine
the housewives climb to the front bedroom with
their oil lamps:
in all the houses of the Great Valley at half-past
nine
shadows mount fantastically over the flowered paper
of the hallways
there is the rustle of gingham up narrow stairs.

MALCOLM COWLEY

MOUNTAIN VALLEY

LOST in this mountain valley, we have struggled
too long for bread. Here corn grows sparse
and yellow
the valley is too narrow and we have driven
Our plows vainly against the flanks of the hill.

No use to struggle further, O my brothers:
instead lie down together here and rest,

and some day when the earth has grown as cold
as the dead craters of the moon, these hills
will wrinkle like the wrinkles on a forehead.
Drawing together somewhat like a finger
against a wrinkled thumb, these hills will squeeze
the valley out between them.
There will be
for us magnificent sepulture, O my kin.

Cold hills already lie
staring down at our cornfields covetously.

DAY COACH

I

TICKETS *PLEASE*
said the conductor and Benjamin settled back
into his seat and by this action wrapped
the overcoat of solitude around him.

Strangers brushed past
down the aisle, soiling only
the fringes of this mantle;

his eyes had turned
to watch the hills that so proceeded like awkward
vast dancers across the curtain of his eyes
to watch the moving
mist of his breath as it crept along the pane.

II

He says to himself
— it is the placing
of the foot upon the step deposited by the porter
it is the leisurely
procession with baggage up a red-plush aisle
out of such gestures there grows
the act of travel.

Johnstown, Pittsburgh: these cities
escape the grasp of the hand
these cities are pimpled on hills
Manhattan is corseted briefly about with waters.

You climb into a train, give a tip, open a paper,
light a cigar, and the landscape
jerks unevenly past.
Your knees straighten
automatically at Pittsburgh; a porter takes the
luggage, saying rapidly
— this way to a taxi, Boss
this way to a taxi.

The hills and fields of Pennsylvania quiver
behind you vaguely, the landscape of a dream.

III

As the other train passed he looked through the plate glass of the dining car — the other — and saw a fork suspended in the air and before it had finished its journey he was peering into a smoking car with a silver haze and four men playing cards over a suitcase clamped to their knees. A world, a veritable world, as seen beneath the microscope. A world in an envelope sealed with the red tail light that proceeded gravely past him up the track. A world sealed out of his world and living for thirty-five seconds of his life.

IV

This bell which suddenly greets us at a crossing
and dies as suddenly; somewhere this bell
rings on for other trains.

A girl stands waving to us in a doorway
down a hillside children run to meet us
a man fishes in a muddy river;

they disappear. Somewhere the handkerchief
still waves against the train; children still play
and I, if I descended from the train
would live eternally in these brief towns
these momentary towns which overhang
perilously, a momentary river.

V

The lights of the train now move
transversely across the water
across the water strides
the shadow of the engineer;
the square barred windows move across the water
as if they marked a prison that exists
never between four walls, but only moves
continually across a world of waters.

VI

His head drooped lower gradually; he dreamed
the locomotive boldly had deserted
the formidable assurance of steel rails;
it turned and leaped
like a beast hunted over the wooded slope
(and all the time the engineer leaning out of his
cab and saying
— the four fourteen will be on time at
Youngstown
the four fourteen will be on time WON'T it,
Bill?).

His head drooped in a comfortable dream.

VII

Time is marked not by hours but by cities; we are one station before Altoona, one station beyond Altoona; CRESSON change cars for Luckett, Munster and all points on the line that runs tortuously back into a boyhood, with the burden of a day dropping like ripe fruit at every revolution of the driving wheel, with a year lost between each of the rickety stations: Beulah Road, Ebensburg, Nant-y-glo; gather your luggage and move it towards the door. BIG BEND.

VIII

O voyagers, with you
I have moved like a firefly over the face of the waters
with you I was spit
like a cherry seed from the puckered lips of the tunnel:
come
let us join our hands
dance
ring around the rosy, farmer in the dell
round and round this clucking locomotive. Come!
(From red cabooses huddled in the yards
from engine cabs and roundhouses will stream
these others silently to join us.)
Come!

IX

Out of the group at the station no single form
detached itself to meet him.
The circle of their backs was a wall against him.

Oblongs of light reflected from the train
moved along the mountainside and vanished.

He buttoned his coat and stumbled into the darkness,

the darkness proceeded along with him until
he picked it up and wrapped it round his shoulders:

bending his shoulders under the weight of the
darkness
he stumbled off with his burden of stars and hills.

JACK MERTEN

CHILDREN AT PLAY

THE wind is rustling in the lane," said Sybil;
"Fairies whispering," said Jane;
"The leaves are sighing overhead;"
"Songs of dying birds," Jane said.

"The vines are dripping with the rain," said Sybil;
"Diamond necklaces," said Jane;
"The toadstools perk their ugly heads;"
"Cricket umbrellas," Jane said.

"The water beats against the pane," said Sybil;
"Clouds are beating drums," said Jane;
"Let's go ask for sugar-bread;"
"Let's do," Jane said.

THE SACRED BIRD

THE Sacred Bird picks golden corn
From the moon's high horn;
And all his shrieks of bird surprise
Men say, on earth, are prophecies.

They seek to lure him down again
With tithes of vinegar and grain;
And show an ornamental Coop
Where censers swing and bishops stoop.

But all the prayers go quite unheard
That seek to tempt the Sacred Bird;
For he is more content to pick
Golden corn where the stars are thick.

JACK MERTEN

ESCAPE

HOW tenderly my antique grace
Has fled, in quiet shoes of dawn;
Leaving me like a sterile space
That gardens frown upon.

Not so vacant, ancient Greece
Nor so abandoned, Menelaus,
Questioning the tight-lipped seas
Where lovely Helen's way is.

Burn me utterly in flame
Let my tongue with fire be fluent,
If, like Troy, I yet entertain
For Troy's ten years my gracious truant.

"FIRST NIGHT" IN EDEN

RAIN–VIOLINS and thunder-drums
  Play an overture;
The curtain-clouds draw far apart
  From earth's stage-floor.

Sun, moon, and star — each tries his part
  As Actor Universal;
While two alone are audience
  To Nature's prime rehearsal.

JACK MERTEN

DIDACTIC

TRUTH and its Verse more surely go
With the sound step the pulses know;
Treading in nice accented feet,
The measured march the red drops beat;
Rubies, whose shapes, like colors, blend:
An even necklace, end to end.

A VISIT

AS she stirred her coffee at dinner in our house,
Aunt Miranda remarked that it wasn't strong
enough
but she would take a third cup anyway;
Also the cake had too much vanilla
but she would take a third piece;
Whereupon I went out in the garden and threw
stones at the hens.

THE THRUSH AND POLYPHEMUS

A MOUNTAIN oak core-riven by a gale,
Shaking its roots and limbs, and stones upstarting;
Such was blind Polyphemus raging on the crags,
Hurling boulders after the ships departing.

Upon the green tuft of a pine nearby
A curious, watchful little thrush was sitting;
"Though I am no giant, though my eyes are
small,
I see, Polyphemus, where your rocks miss hitting."

JAPAN — ABOUT 1877

(*After the United States had introduced the telegraph.*)

BEWILDERED blue dragon-flies,
Needle-bodied and round-headed,
Swarm about the new-stretched telegraph wires
And balance there, heads down, tails up, in amazement;
Like notes they perch upon a music staff
Printed against the white dawn's vellum page,
As you, musician, read the song they score:
"Hail, Columbia!"

JOEL T. ROGERS

THE BEGGAR

POOR, blind Pete,
He follows the circus
With shuffling, tireless feet,
From village to rustic towns
Over the dusty country ways
He shambles, nor sees the golden days,
Nor the ungleaned harvests upon the downs;
Nor all the world's bold splendor.
Holding out his rusty cup
To see what coppers he may pick up,
Looking forth with barren sight —
Into the night.

About him the great throngs move by,
Heavy and loud,
They push, they shriek, they sneer, they cry,
Murmuring ever, in one hoarse Babel.
With shoulders bowed
He hears them as the vacant rush of tides
As the loud and empty grief of tides,
Upon an unseen coast within the night,
Moaning through the caverns of the night.

Roaring with a thousand clamoring tongues,
Snarling against the rocks
With thunderous shocks,
Vague, mighty, broken, dark.
Hark!

Sitting crosslegged as the gods
Born within the purple East,
He bows and stares and dully nods.
All fear has ceased,
All sorrow, all despair,
All memory that the world is fair.
Like Lazarus at the rich man's feast
He hums a simple air:
"Give, give to the blind man
God gave no light to the blind man,
Give, kind sirs, to the blind man,
And he will pray for you."

Sing, oh sing, you blind man!
Sing of death, of life, of love,
And of the scornful fates that weave the loom thereof,
Of the fates that made you blind.
Homer with the vacant eyes,
And the soul of air and fire,
Made mock of even destiny,

Wandering with his sounding lyre
From the islands of the sea.

Sing forth with a triple tongue, O blind of sight!
Shout forth unto the world your loves, your hates,
Make up a verse to warm young women,
To heroes dying in the fight,
That men may know the scorned will of the fates,
And see the soul that struggles within your everlasting night.

Ponderous despair!
Even they, the goddesses of the snaky hair,
Have robbed you of all gifts of music
As they took your sight away.
Blind Thamyris, blind Thamyris,
Hopeless with the broken lyre.
Murmuring inanities!
You may not sing,
Nor soar with the blind Chian bard into the blazing ring,
But you may wait, as few men wait,
The hour that comes, or soon or late,
And brood within your solitude
Upon the shape of vacancy;
What better could a wise man be,
Philosopher of vacancy?

You are a Vishnu robed in state,
You are Buddha at the gate,
Waiting with a stony gaze
The consummation of the days.
You are a very God indeed,
Unwitting of the ways of men;
But even now a sneak-thief steals
His deft hand past your hand, and feels
The pauper's coins, wrung from charity.
No one may see —
He takes with swift and subtle care
The pennies of despair.

A drunkard reels against him, whiskey-mad,
And curses him and staggers on again,
The village boys throw stones into his cup,
And leer at him, and mock with vile names.
A child stands by in strange surprise;
"What is the matter with that man's eyes,
Mother?" "Hush, my sweet,
He is nothing but a cheat."
Ah, blind Pete!
Even children's pity, lightly given,
Warm with sorrow, dew of heaven,
Even children's pity falls from you.
Rue! Rue!

And now or then in idleness or scorn
A woman whispers: "Why are such things born?"

And shudders, and withdraws her skirt,
As fearful lest it touch some dirt,
Dropping a nickel for sweet charity.
Ah, blind man, thank your God you cannot see!
Did once your mother hold you dear
In that dim childhood land of dreams
From where the soul creeps up, in fear;
And did she whisper gentle lies
To your blind eyes?

Unseen, unseen, how terribly unseen,
For you there is no Nazarene
To touch your eyes, and whisper: "Be they clean."
For you no hope, no beauty, no delight,
No red and golden day, no silver light,
Nor the long sable reaches of the night,
No yesterday beyond the night, no morrow past
the night.
Ah, Pete, blind Pete!
Do you find existence sweet?
You who never saw a child's warm face
Nor knew a maiden's subtle grace,
You who have known no love —
God above!

No love!
The crowd crawls past, engrossed in other things,
The pygmies and the men who swallow fire,

The human horse that really sings, —
Epitomes of all desire.
And still he sings of vacant things:
"Give, give to the blind man, —
God gave no light to the blind man,
Give, kind sirs, to the blind man,
And he will pray for you."

O, in the Name of God, yaps!
In the Name of the God of Nazareth, yaps!
Spare your popcorn and lemonade,
Your peanuts and your pink lemonade,
Give a dime unto the blind.
Christ walked in Galilee, and was kind
Even to the whining blind.
Give but a dime for His sweet sake
Who died upon the bitter stake.
Loosen up a dime, yaps!
O, in the Name of God!

JOEL T. ROGERS

THE MARAUDERS

I

NOW the sun is low, and the winds are dead,
And over the meadows there walk three maids,
While the last gold spear of the sunlight fades.

Now the cheeks of the first are poppy red,
And the second has a golden head,
But the eyes of the third are grey as lead,
And the black hair falls on her shoulder.

"I was sixteen on Saint Catherine's day,"
Says the first. And the other, "Well a-day!
Last night I dreamed of a suitor gay."

"I know a lord lives far away,"
Says the third, "And he is mine own true lover."

"It is time we think of men," they say,
As they go their way through the clover.

"The man I love must love me dear."

"He whom I marry must know no fear."

But the third maid drops a silent tear
For she thinks of the stranger lover.

And on they go while the night draws near
Over the fields to the northward.

II

Now the moon is high, and the winds begin,
And out of the woodlands there ride three men,
While a cloud wreath veils the moon again.

Now the eyes of the first are bale and thin,
And the second has a cloven chin,
But the face of the third is hard as sin,
And the long gun gleams on his shoulder.

"Perchance some maidens may come this way,"
Says the first. And the second, "Well a-day!
A pretty prize for a bold foray."

"The time is long before the day,"
Says the third, "There is space enough for evil."

"We ride in luck tonight," they say
As they see the maids through the clover.

"The foremost maid is half divine."

"The fair-haired maid I take for mine."

But the third man utters never a line,
For he sees the dark-haired maiden.

And they give their horses the bitter tine,
Spurring them on to the southward.

III

Now the moon is low, and the winds make moan,
And over the moorland there go three steeds
While the waters lap in the river reeds.

Now the limbs of the first are huge of bone,
And the second has a heart of stone,
But the third one is a raw thewed roan
And the muscles leap on his shoulder.

"The weight of our saddles is light today,"
Says the first. And the other, "Well a-day!
They rode us far, but they had to pay."

"One time too much to ride the way,"
Says the third, "And that is the end of the story."

"The stealing of maids is death," they say,
As they breast the strength of the river.

"The first maid wept, for her heart grew numb."

"The fair-haired smiled, half glad to come."

But the third steed gallops along as dumb,
For he dreams of the dark-haired maiden.

And their hoof beats thud like a muffled drum
Thundering on to the eastward.

IV

Now the sun is high, and the winds a-rage,
And far in the branches there sit three crows,
While the tall trees writhe, and the tempest blows.

Now the eyes of the first are grave and sage,
And the second is of ancient age,
But the third is king, and a mighty mage,
And the grey plumes droop on his shoulder.

"The dead men dance as they were gay,"
Says the first. And the other, "Well a-day!
Three fine fat morsels of human clay."

"Time enough now for their sins to pray,"
Says the third, "While they hang for the theft of
the maidens."

"The kinsmen's vengeance was swift," they say,
As they sharpen their beaks and their talons.

"The maidens might love them and grow well
fain."

"A woman loves always a man of main."

But they look for the mage to speak in vain
For he thinks of the stranger lover.

And they leave the dead to the wind and the rain,
Flapping their vans to the westward.

JOEL T. ROGERS

MINED

WEARILY, wearily, crawled the ship,
And a small, slow wind made smooth her path
Moving the ocean to the lip
Of heaven, where the two worlds' swath
Was purple, though the heaven's tip
Was brass and bright as wrath.
No foeman went upon that sea,
And the deeps of the yellow air
Where three black gulls winged aimlessly
Were desolate and blindly bare.
But still the wind went to the lee
And the blue waves were fair.

The brass upon the ship's white deck
Gleamed loudly as a thousand suns.
Her prow was bold. No single fleck
Darkened her cloudy sides, where tons
Of water felt the iron check.
Most stern shone her gray guns.

A thousand men upon her boards
Went bravely forth and back and in.
Shifting the wheel her battle lords
Stared at the sea they hoped to win.
As the most sheering steel of swords
Her course was straight and thin.

"This thing is dull," the Lieutenant swore,
And smoothed his curls, and set his coat.
"Brave men are dying on the shore
While we crawl with the crawling boat.
Give me the rifle's song once more,
The drum, the bugle's note!"

"England is fair," the Lieutenant said,
"And she I love is all delight.
Do these our standards gleam so red
They are afraid to come and fight?"
But the Captain watched the sea ahead
And thought of the dark night.

No foeman went upon that sea,
Nor in the vaults of the bright air,
But the lookout felt all suddenly
The bottoms of the deep upflare
And her steel bow shiver in three,
And her strong bulkheads tear.

"Now know we death," the Captain thought,
"For we have struck a skulking mine.
A better time we might have sought
Fighting with brave ships in the line.
Now many battles are unfought
Beneath our battle sign."

A thousand strong men crowded aft,
For her bow bent to the purple wave.
And some got sticks to make a raft,
And some, whose hearts and limbs were brave,
Looked on the sea and idly laughed
To watch the white surge lave.

"Now know we death," the Captain said,
"For we have struck a skulking mine."
And each man thought of hours long dead,
Of unkissed lips and undrunk wine.
But the ship dropped downward at the head.
And the sea was black with brine.

"England is fair," the Lieutenant cried,
"And she I love is all delight.
It would be well could we abide
To perish for them in the fight,
Than in this seething, sullen tide
Knowing the bitter night."

The swift sea struck her on her keel,
And rived in shards her iron decks,
And burst her plates of welded steel
Like wormy pine beneath the axe.
And the deep gulfs snatched her by the heel
Down to the grave of wrecks.

No foeman went upon that sea,
And the caverns of the yellow air
Where three black gulls ringed aimlessly
Were desolate and blindly bare.
And a sharp wave shook the white spume free
As a woman shakes her hair.

JOEL T. ROGERS

TEMPEST NIGHT

WIND in the void, where the white stars shake,
And the storm scud shivers across the moon,
There is fire, there is flame, there is storm in the sky!
Beloved, your eyes are half awake
To the murmuring music of an old tune,
The voice of sorrow long gone by;

Sorrow long gone, but now more near
Than the measureless tumult of your heart.
Even this hour of music seems
A withered woe, and dry, and sere
When the violins cease, and the dancers part,
And the voices vanish like frail dreams.

There is fire, there is flame, there is storm in the night!
The shore is stounded by surge and surge,
And the dark arms of the stalwart tides.
Hear to the shadow and sound of delight;
The music of laughter and whispers verge,
They are one, they are naught, and naught abides.

Beloved, your eyes are half awake —
Do you watch the flame and storm on the sea,
And the black disaster which nears and nears
Till the poplars bend, and the cedars break,
And the music hushes silently,
And the night hangs heavily years and years?

JOEL T. ROGERS

FRUIT OF THE TREE

IN the dark ocean which rolls a molten world
beneath the hammers of sunset,
In the majestical mountains which strike the heavens with sudden spears,
In the heavy mystery of the earth, tearing the veils, and the flesh which is but a veil,
Yes, in the stars which roll onward through destinies, inexorable, yet knowing not ends nor their places,
In these have I sought repletion of longing, satiety, fulness of longing.
I have found it not. I have found it not. Tell me, you spirits of earth, you women,
Why sweeter are your arms, and the gift of your body, which you sell for a night and a purple garment,
Than all the lofty flights of the soul, which knows the outermost comets.

By the salt sea I went, past cloud, and wind, and star, and moon to chaos,
Where the earth went by with flickering bale, a firefly at night in terrible forests.
There nothing the greatest God might behold of an island ringed by her oceans.

Nor of a city built on that island of straw and clay on sinking sands,
Or of a house where the red rose blossoms, or of a couch in a room of hidden shadows.
When the shadows deepen, and the red rose falls, and the sands are sunken in tidal waters,
And the flickering bale goes out, where will you be, O girl, the well-beloved?
Even there, even there, in unutterable chaos, I cried on you, Elena!

At the cool of the evening God walked alone in the garden along the lanes of the roses,
Knowing the fulness of creation, of what his hands had builded, of good and evil.
Fulness of creation; all things are ended because of the power of beginning and end
Which lies in the immaculate hands. And the dusk came down, and the summer night.
Then in a turn of the lane in the garden, where the dark roses cover the ground, and the crimson
Are heavy and drowsy, where the humming bird darts, and the drunken moths beat silken shadows,
Lay Adam, lord of creation, star-gazer, moulder of idols, and in his arms the woman.
God wept, for heaven seemed hollow . . .

JOEL T. ROGERS

SHOT DOWN

WHY did you send young Larry out?
Major, Major, tell me true,
Who knew so little of the wars
Where there was fearful work to do,
And where the red-eyed pirate ships
Go up and down with ravening lips.

Why did you send young Larry out?
There were brave men who stood near by,
Who had brought down their tens and tens,
And knocked the fleets from out the sky
When the circuses went down in rings
Before the thunder of their wings.

Why did you send young Larry out?
Who still had all, and all to learn.
Was it that he might come an ace,
And so a silver medal earn,
And tread where the immortals tread
Scarce less beatified than the dead?

Why did you send young Larry out?
Major, Major, tell me true.
For her whose hair is cloudy bright,
Whose mouth is of the honey dew,
And in whose arms young Larry lay,
Dreaming what dreams you cannot say.

Young Larry's soul, I am quite sure,
Will never rise to fright your dreams,
Since he meets the maidens of Paradise,
And sleeps by the sunset's silver streams.
And she, she goes her devious ways:
You are too old to waste her days.

JOEL T. ROGERS

OMNISCIENT SCIENCE

O YOU, who look up to the stars,
And write within your heavy books
Upon the age and size of Mars,
And how the world is hung by hooks,
(Or some invention full as fine)
Tell me this riddle if you may:
Why, when I have drunk good wine,
Does my spirit walk the Milky Way?

And you, who form the elements,
Mingling water to make fire,
You who are so far from sense
You have surmounted all desire,
Why is it I, who am not seen
At conclaves of your mighty skulls,
Find in the lips of Leontine
More fire than in your crucibles?

So you who tutor dusty fools,
And measure continents and seas,
Weighing the finite molecules
Which are but fleas unto the fleas,
May answer this without a doubt
By some cosmic scheme which never fails:
Where go I when my light goes out;
How is it weighed within what scales?

FALLING STAR

HE did not meet them in the cloud
Which fills her hollow caves with rain,
Nor yet below the cirrus snow
Which floats full dreamily to the main.

From out the void the strong winds blew
Sweeping the halls of heaven bare;
For miles away in that clear day
Their sparkling wings shone through the air.

Their sparkling wings shone with the sun,
Lighting the heavens terribly,
As when the brave bright banners wave
Upon the ships upon the sea.

He should have seen them, but his eyes
Were cast on visions fair and far,
Upon the high, frail enterprise,
Upon the holy wings of war.

Full three miles past eternity
The dim blue earth went round her poles,
And the slow sweep of her curving deep
Was more than all her murmuring souls.

Then were they on him, and their guns
Spoke loudly out above the roar
And thundering of brazen suns
Where he will wander nevermore.

. . . . . .

Through noon the heaving armies go,
Through noon their feet tramp in the mire
The meadowlands; and in their hands
The rifles glint to fire and fire.

From out of space falls down a speck,
A speck, a spark, a flame, a spark,
Trailing behind the smoky wind;
A star has fallen to the dark.

R. CAMERON ROGERS

LAST NIGHT

LAST night I heard the winds rejoice
In Sussex on the downs,
And hearkened to the friendly voice
Of one who loves not towns.
I sat with open eyes and saw
The dawn tear wide the sky and draw
The smoke from red-tiled cottages,
The mist from out the trees.

The harvest and the smoke, the tang
Of spindrift from the sea,
Was sweet to breathe in the wind that sang
Over the downs to me.
I closed my eyes and they shouldered there
Above Greatham fields and the chalk road bare
With the heather a purple flame between,
Just as it ought to be.

Last night I heard the wind rejoice,
I heard him on the downs,
Though I was far from his friendly voice,
Mewed up in the streets of towns.

BALLAD OF ERRANT VESPERS

THE wind, when comes late afternoon,
Sweeps up from vespers bells the croon
Of shadowed sanctity and soon
Bids it forget its prayer.

It carries it beyond the town,
Beyond the Mission and the frown
Of deep-niched figures that look down
On joys they may not share,

And yonder, where the ranges keep
Eternal tryst with sky and sleep,
It calls no longer men to weep
Their sins and kneel to pray,

But turns into a mazy thing,
A pagan and a lazy thing,
A catch to make a Trappist sing,
And harry nymphs all day,

A lilting sort of bacchanal,
Most irreligious, passional,
With choruses antiphonal
Of river, wind, and tree,

And thus it babbles in the ferns
Until at dawn the wind returns,
And sweeps it up again and learns
How ribald it can be.

So just as matins breaks the hush
Near five o'clock and with the thrush
Stir folk abroad with tuneful rush
Of neatly mingled chimes,

All fresh with dew and valley loam,
The truant vesper-call flits home,
But Mary knows 'twould rather roam
Than pray a thousand times.

SONNET

THERE is in her a vague, idyllic grace
Intangible as chimes adrift in wind,
A grace familiar with the chords that bind
Beauty to beauty with the centuries' pace,
Yet with the clouded hair about that face
Del Sarto might have painted, with the shadows
Massed in a background of dim, barren meadows,
She seems enthronëd in a holy place.

But it is sad, sometimes, that she should speak
In words that you and I may understand,
For when such beauty here is close at hand
All else beside its mystery is weak.
And I would hear the music when she smiles
Float from Lucrezia's altar down the aisles.

REVERIE

ALONG the crowded shelves the lamplight falls,
In arabesques and patterns and dim gules,
Caressing crabbed handiwork of schools
Long dead and long forgotten. One recalls
Inscriptions on old tombstones blurred with mould,
Petitioning a glance from passers-by.

But there where Rabelaisian volumes lie,
Flanked by Brantôme and Villon, bound in gold,
There still, life, love, and wine run merrily.
Gargantua jests with young Pantagruel
In some Tourainian castle oriel,
Defying Death and Time's slow alchemy.

Above the tiers with carven, sightless eyes,
Milton, in scorn of French frivolity,
Gazes on Satan hurled from Paradise.

LINES

STAY yet awhile and watch the shadows lengthen
Across the paths. The whispering voices strengthen
Above us in the poplars where the light
Of ageing afternoon breaks through less bright
To blur the purple sun-line on the dial.
Stay yet awhile.

Perhaps we missed her where the roses screen
Her favorite walk between the oaks that lean
To form an arbor for her passing there,
But she will come and make the spot more fair
With all her peaceful beauty and her smile.
Stay yet awhile.

R. CAMERON ROGERS

UNDER DARK SKIES

UNDER the dark skies across the amber sands
I watched the tide fling in its silver bands,
Marked how it swung between the marshalled dunes,
To creep at last unheeded to lagoons
Beyond the surf where all the cadence dies,
Under dark skies.

Mayhap, had you been there, we should have found
Among your reeds dim pools of rippling sound,
And heard the music from the tumult glide
On shining feet upon that secret tide,
And traced its echo where the dream-mists rise
Under dark skies.

THRENODY

IN olive leaves a lyre hung
Where whispered winds in every dawn,
And gently with the winds it swung,
And sang of sun-splashed fragrant things.

A few untroubled dawns, and then
The strings lay sodden in the grass.
For all time lost to those few men
That, passing by, had heard its songs.

But still to dawns the lyre sings,
Half hidden in the olive leaves,
Of some transplanted tree that springs,
From orchard-sod by Acheron.

And still, sad little winds come soft
From vigils o'er the fields of Dis,
To murmur those dead songs that oft
By dear familiar ways were sung.

This passing light strikes through the leaves
On those that flutter from the years,
And lo! 'tis only wind that grieves.

R. CAMERON ROGERS

WRITTEN IN A COPY OF HORACE

COULD you tell from all his satires
Odes and epodes and the rest,
Mocking, lauding verbal empires,
Could you tell what he loved best
In his life, and where his home was,
Had you read them, could you tell?

Just how fair the Sabine fields lay,
Spread below his Tibur home,
How those hours after noon-day
Sped in musing far from Rome,
What his really dearest dreams were,
What his visions, could you tell?

Yea, and I, too, lived an Idyll,
Just a day long, it is true,
But were I to frame the riddle
In Horatian lines, could you
Read *my* life, *my* dreams, *my* visions?
Say, then, Chloe, could you tell?

ISOTTA

(Detta La Divina)

"DIVAE Isottae Sacrum," true,
And like a saint's inscription too,
But really did she pray there?
Could even she, without a smile,
Kneel meekly in Alberti's aisle
And Credo softly say there?

Did she, ah brazen, dream to hide
Her sins from Him they crucified,
By graceful genuflexion?
And that the glory of her face
Would gain the flesh celestial grace
Maugre the soul's rejection?

Or did she come and, Aves said,
Lift up that perfect Umbrian head
That all should know her fair?
And fair enough to shame them, too,
Who called her damned, since well she knew
Her God was debonair.

"Quia multum amavit," haply she
Long since hath found the living tree,
With Magdalen to guide her.
I wonder, is it purged away
The charm, that drew all men to pray
In Rimini, beside her?

AFTER THE GREAT WIND

LET us not further trespass down this lane
Since now the trees will feel a leathern tread
Over their hidden feet, and silencëd
Will know we are not centaurs come again.

A moment past, and they perhaps had seen
In our slow-moving shadows, only those,
So rapt were they in sound, they might have been
With shouting autumn seas where no man knows.

But now the weald is very still; above,
That quadrature of limbs like twisted bars,
Has scarcely moved, since last the great wind drove
Its Viking song beneath the candent stars.

So thunderous a force, it seemed the downs
Would crumble in its passing, and be gone
When we who loved them, in our orisons,
Looked southward for their silhouette at dawn.

Familiar winds there are, as shepherds know,
That wheel above the southdown flocks at noon,
And those that in the twilight come and go,
In deep-cleft lanes a-gossip with the moon.

But this was alien, and its frenzy stirred
Our stoic trees to clamorous unrest,
Pelting this sky with some barbaric word
That seemed half battle-slogan and half jest.

But even now it passes Finisterre;
Now are its voices strident over Spain.
Let us return: the land is quiet here,
And over us the constellations wane.

Sussex, 1921

ROYALL SNOW

GENRE: INTERIOR

SOME day I shall hope to come again and find
you
With that same serenity of sweetness in your smile
And three small children who may not mind you
Better than normal youngsters do . . .
They will be scrubbed and red and boyish . . .
And we shall sit and talk a while
(Two children on my knees, the one with you
Too shy to answer my advances)
In a room that shows your work
Through a comfortable disarray that still is neat.
For to your sort of heart no circumstances
Bred of poverty or wealth can bring defeat
And I'll come back some day just for the joy
(Joy sweetened with sorrow that such a wife
By the errancies of wanderlust exile
Had been forbidden to my life)
Of seeing your old smile
Light at the chatter of your youngest boy.

SPRING LANDSCAPE

HERE sways the willow
As the wind drifts by
And fields long fallow
Lie fertile under this warm sky.
The thrust of young things spreads
Green through the hollow
And on the slopes appear the heads
Of grain soft days will mellow.

Break out in sudden song, swift bird
Above this stillness:
Sing out the canticle of new life stirred
From winter chillness;
Be living voice for silent life
Here where the sun has taken fecund earth to wife!

ANDREA, ONCE MORE

SOME say: great heart meets heart in Raphael
While only soulless eyes find nothing there
Conceived sublime enough to make him heir
In adoration to great Gabriel;
And that for all Andrea's perfect swell
Of modulated line and colour-flare
His hand worked only, his heart was unaware
Those things eternal which the seraphs tell.

But yet there never lacked to perfect heart
A cunning hand to make its glory known,
Nor yet no perfect hand has ever shown
An ultimate perfection in high art
But there has beat within its subtle veins
Blood from a heart refined in infinite pains.

MUSIC ROOM DUET

TURN from me then, if so you must!
I only said that we were fools who thus obeyed
Proprieties which dead men made
To keep the living flesh forever dust.
But I shall know that if your face is hid
(Turned as it is to your still instrument)
It is because you fear assent
And even lack the courage to forbid!

But there's a meaning in that sudden chord
Unless I have misread
It says in fire what a word
Would strike in lead.
Come then, the chord is touched, a promise given
That ends not this side of heaven.

PRIESTESSES

THE delicate unearthly music
Of still violins awakes
For loving hands and lovers only;
And words, like mistresses of men
That give their bodies to a common use
Reserve a chapel in their hearts
That none may see save in all holiness.

We should be tender of them, that bandied on all
human tongues
They yet preserve as steady as the slow straight
burning of cathedral candles
Their faith with loveliness.
They serve the wanton, but to those accredited
They open gates on gardens glimmering with eerie
lanterns,
Or fling up a radiance of scattered sparks,
Or catch and echo Roland's horn once more.

Airily imperious of whim
As Vivien's caprice for Merlin
In Broceliande
There are words as splendidly flirtatious
As tall gold-headed girls;

Their laughter quivers in and out our speech
Like windy flickering of sunlight on wet leaves,
It gleams against those bolder words
Whose valiance has the ring of metal struck, —
Of conquest on a thousand fields.

CROSSROADS

I THOUGHT then of Cophetua, the king,
Who by a girl's singing and clear eyes
Was moved to wed his power to her spring,
And so was wise.

And of myself, who saw the gypsies take the road
And wondered what my study gave
To match the carelessness those vagrants showed —
But lacked the wisdom to be brave.

MESSAGE FROM ONE ENAMOURED

PERHAPS I shall forget your face
When I have found some secret pool
The cool trees trace with shadow;
And when a lithe wind's easy grace
Makes amorous the willows
Perhaps the star-bell music of your voice
Will cease to echo in my ears.

But far more likely I shall find
It is the thought of you makes sweet
My reveries in this retreat
Where there will be a whisper in the air that will
remind
My heart how musically your lips could speak.

MEDICI FOUNTAIN

CITIZENS of democracy are gathered here
And children play in the gardens of a king.
The birds sing and the leaves make shadows still
Here where the clear heart of the water
    Holds so many things:
The lost image of purple satins and scarlet
    And a queen's delicate face.

And another century will see new trees reflected
And others after us who look
Into the clear heart for an image of today
Or for the memory of what is gone.

PORTRAIT IN SINISTER LIGHTS

DOOM walks with her
Born eager for the offerings of all ages
And unmatched with her own; —
With her, amorous of she knows not what,
Blind to the world which rules her.

Only the small souls flourish
On an earth luminous in star-light;
Black-hilled with shoulders supporting the sky;
Holding in its lap the music of running streams.
Here, on an earth sown with the gold seed-lights
of cities,
An earth where the mile-wide wheat fields bend
under winds,
And thunderstorms are lost in mountains —
Here only the small souls flourish!

Millions of them, the small souls:
Sand grains in a dune.
The wind blows
and they creep . . . creep . . .
A dune moves slowly and trees vanish,
Bright leafed trees once gay in the sun are lost;
Houses are buried, houses where men loved and
children were born
Are eaten . . . as a dune moves slowly.

Sand grains in a desert, millions there are.
A hurricane whips, and death for the lonely
traveller
Rides fiercely over the desert.
They are hard, these sand grains, hard and little
and sharp.
There is a bright sparkle to the mass of them
flashing under the sun,
And they cannot be hurt.

In this woman is the folly of yearning,
And doom walks beside her
Cloaked in a cold wind and unseen
But seeing.
He will mark her brow with his sign
And she will walk in a sand-grain world
To her death.

And no Homer will sing her
(Homer himself, with the other great,
Was marked by doom and begged
In his seven cities)
For she shares but the sadness of outcast souls,
In her is only a yearning.

Homer was doom-marked and suffered, —
Dante and Milton and Shakespeare too,
But they were greater than suffering,

They died in that world where the small souls
flourish;
They lived in their own.

And Helen was great and Homer sang her,
Chronicled loveliness born to suffer,
Terrible beauty avenged itself
While Greece, long desolate,
Waited for sons who never returned;
While burning Troy in the shrill black night
Smouldered like a giant ruby by the sea.

But in this woman (unmatched with her own time
And unaware its menace)
There is nothing great —
Only a fine eagerness: crisp and sweet and fresh
As tendrils of young plants,
Equally helpless against wind-blown sand.
She will come sweet and eager,
And doom will walk with her.

JOHN BROOKS WHEELWRIGHT

DR. RIMMER'S HAMILTON ON COMMONWEALTH AVENUE AND ARLINGTON STREET

GRANITE unsharded by the fires of revolt,
granite refined to the subtlety of a porcelain goddess of mercy —
common-sense Hamilton!
Under the elm's sex-partite vaulting,
opposing the agitation of Washington on horseback
stands Hamilton, —

He has the stodgy dignity of a tobacco Indian
with his pompous calf stuck out after the Bourbon manner;
but his shoulders, pressing forward with the elemental impulse
of a figurehead upon a Yankee clipper
(the *Invincible*, you know, that rounds Cape Horn in no time)
show us Hamilton, the genius of the Yankee
Ship of State.

The sculptor,
as he chipped in a crisp mastery the medallion on
the pedestal,
thought, no doubt, of Thorvaldsen;
but his nostrils smarted with the native fragrance
of ships' carving
with the nostalgic smells of China hanging over the
warm wharves of Salem
as he pounded the *esprit* with a mallet and a chisel
into the laboured, bare achievement of the staunch
little spine
of Federalist Hamilton, the arrogant bastard under
a prophetic mantle —
Hamilton,
the untroubled wisdom that speaks behind the
mask of Washington,
Hamilton, voice of Sovereignty.

JOHN BROOKS WHEELWRIGHT

THE SOPHOMORE

I

WHEN, catching his own glance, he analysed
What stared so impolitely from the mirror,
He wondered if he earnestly despised
That callow face. Or did he hold it dearer

Because, unlike his classmates, he preferred
Talk of autumnal women, always mellow,
Or boys, with whom his well-considered word
Not always marked him as a crazy fellow?

II

Their naked, small ambitions are disgusting;
They prize the world's poor business more than peace;
They have no virtue but their charm; encrusting
Their speech with filth, they ape senilities.

— Waiting for age to make him less uncouth,
He dared condemn too harshly their conceit,
And, blaming their inevitable youth,
Condemned himself as well, and owns — defeat.

BOSTON IN SUMMER, WITH A CONFESSION

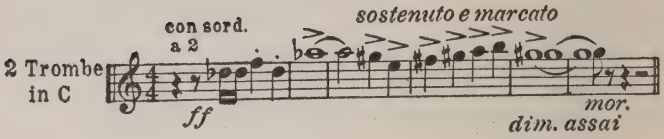
NEGLECTED *Transcripts* on the steps of
houses boarded up
and blinking behind diamonds, diamonds, hearts,
and quatrefoils.
A fountain playing in the rain always shocks me
(so extravagant!) But then,
I was ever one to suck squeezed grape skins
and pour boiling water over used tea leaves.
Still,
should my summer pass without the glare
of orange paths, tropic palms,
and, in the sweaty night, swan-boats looped with
lanterns,
I would flinch before our Siberian winter
and April dung storms.

JOHN BROOKS WHEELWRIGHT

NEW YORK IN SUMMER: INSOMNIA

BENEATH trees whose leaves
munch the air like jaws
of crocodiles steeped in Nicaraguan waters,
I sit,
sipping milk from a sherbet glass in the moonlight.
Trucks and elevated trains shatter the dawning.
I think of how you have beaten your mistress,
my temples throb, and I quiver,
though I had much rather
be asleep.
Later on in the year, when the light of the jaded
moon is faded
the newspapers will lie crumpled in the fountains;
the dust will begin to whirl down the streets
in little typhoons;
the city will be arid, the window-sills grimy;
and the basins of the fountains half-filled with
stagnant rain.
I have sipped all my milk,
the sherbet glass is empty but for moonlight, —
I must try to sleep.

COQ D'OR



THE fountain is frozen in the Plaza,
the little Venus a-top
who has been squeezed out of a tube of toothpaste,
looks very much as though she had no clothes on.
Silly attempt
of some newspaper man to lend
conscious dignity to the city
with his own notoriety as the rate of interest.

"*Let us have peace*," says Grant,
with the dreadnaughts smoking below him in the
Hudson:
"*Let there be light*," says God,
and skyscrapers rise all about.
"*War is Hell*," says Sherman,
covered with old snow and sparrow-droppings.
Silly cursing,
for soon his war horse will be trampling
on the borrowed wings and drapery of the gilded angel.

Soon the city will be swathed again in bunting
flopping with flags which look like pieces of awning
with their corners torn out.
This is what the newspapers whisper
as they rustle on the benches,
They want war.
Soon they will be shrieking it in the voice of a
million urchins.
What they say, goes.

"*Ha-ha-ha! Hee! Hee!*"
cries the Coq d'Or a-top the Hecksher building.
Soon this card city of the Vanderbilts
will be tumbling about us.

ON A ROCOCO CRUCIFIX

GUARDED by bursts of glory, golden rays, —
Christ, when I see thee hanging there alone
In ivory upon an ebon throne;
Like Pan, pard-girded, chapleted with bays;
I kiss thy mouth, I see thee in a haze,
But not of tears, of heartbreak there is none . . .
Is it, oh, Sufferer, my heart is stone?
Am I, in truth, the Judas who betrays?

To hang in shame above a gory knoll,
To die of scorn upon a splintered pole, —
This was not beautiful, I know, for thee . . .
Would I have whispered upon Calvary,
"An interesting silhouette, there, see!"
While God groaned in the dark night of his soul?

HOLY SATURDAY

AM I, in truth, the Judas who betrays?
Is it, oh, Sufferer, my heart is stone?"
— This rhetoric indecently displays
The meanness of a spirit over-prone
To chant its litanies, beg God atone
For poses in the cadence of self-praise,
And, treasuring its poor pride, to bemoan
Even frivolities in paraphrase.

Is any Penitential Sacrament
Effective to atone for the inept,
The subtle, the indomitably adept
Folly of being human? Grave of God!
When most contrite I am most platipod —
Rise Christ! give these feet wings! my need is exigent.

MIDWINTER WALK IN CENTRAL PARK

WHAT heather is parading along the park in a
mist
with leather yellow that is fading, mingling with
amethyst?
Tips of branches! Trees in winter! As I stumble,
plunder, crush
through the nimble leaves I wonder
why it is ever said the trees are dead —
I can never take it in. The trees are wading naked
in translucent waves of underbrush.

JOHN BROOKS WHEELWRIGHT

To E. S. C.

PERHAPS some one of you has lost a friend
who had a gift of saying wondrous things
you can't remember, and yet you can't forget,
sayings which make you almost weep for more,
now that you know that more can never come —

a friend not made to go to God, but just to live until the flesh dropped from him and he saw he had been near detested angels all the while . . .

Out there in Leavenworth that bored you,
upon the eve of your return,
(proud of your shoulder-straps, back among friends,
then on to France) — "An over-dose of morphine?"
It is absurd. A doctor couldn't kill one
who never cared a bit for heaven, who built
philosophy upon a scorn of standards,
whose warm blood flowing underneath cool skin,
clear as an autumn evening, flooded all
his tender frailty with fury. Streams
of sympathy pour over distant heights,
dispassionately intimate in death.

Now and again, when tipsy friends plumb deeps
of conversation unexpressed, you come

and hover over the home-brew and speak
in random piano notes some fellow makes
to ornament his wit. Soft eyes gleam
through the tobacco smoke; once more a flush
runs over those cheek bones: your pale, quick
smile —
then you are off with books under your arm,
journeying round this world, blind to its vanity.

Some day, perhaps, when this life's reel is run
and flickered out, and all your friends have left
their seats for strangers; you'll leave this movie-
show
and find outside in fresher air your pleasure
of heavenly colleges set amid living waters.
Your friends will "hallo" you, bear you off to join
the saints who sing and dance about the Virgin,
and on the cool evening there to hear
a Voice that walks among the apple trees.

JOHN BROOKS WHEELWRIGHT

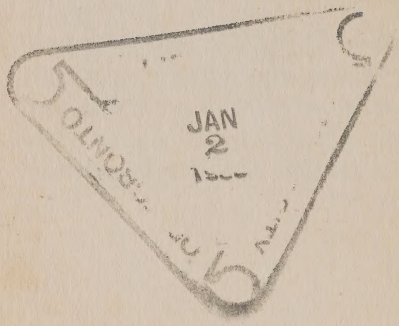
CLOSING GESTURE

THE spheres are weary of the ether wind,
weary of humming endlessly;
their praise of God thrills not as when it rolled
forth when God himself was young.
Nature wakes every morning lame from giving birth,
the valleys faint to view the long exhaustion of the
hills,
the mounting ages are as vain as the flutter of a
paper prayer.
Mould, not truth, lies under
the interesting heaps of refuse of the scientists.
The flame of faith, beaten out and scattered abroad
by the clumsy wiles of states that detest their
swollen greatness,
flickers and sinks.
Comfortless art crumbles to dust in prisons,
out of doors in factories and advertisements,
beauty takes on unhappy forms . . .

The choristers of God are weary of his court,
to Seraph love seems flat; to Cherub knowledge stale.
Michael yearns to splinter his two-handed sword,
and pare the sable wings of Azrael to the quick.
All the servants of the Lord see that their tasks
are hopeless.

Yet out the burning caverns of deep space,
God, though he aches with his weariness, scourges
our backs,
with his relentless whip:
roaring and rolling through the shuddering all,
comes his command,
"Go on!"

Myself,
stand against the black drift of storms,
trustful as the appealing brave, praying with his arms,
invincible as Hamilton in granite,
firm as a colossal crucifix upon a mountain trail
forever changeless against a changing sky.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